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ABSTRACT

The situation of the lecturers in the English Department at the University of Nevada Reno (UNR) is relevant to discussions of the conference on College Composition and Communication's Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing. A "second-tier" solution was implemented in 1981, and in 1993 the department consisted of 20 tenure-track faculty and a second tier of 9 lecturers. The department also has a fairly stable group of part-time instructors, hired on a semester basis. The lecturers have 3-year wrap around contract, benefits, and voting rights of regular faculty members except those regarding tenure issues. As the lecturers participate in department and university governance, they find themselves frustratingly both inside and outside the system: they are told that they have all the rights of faculty members, yet everyone knows that they belong to a group which is at a distinct disadvantage. Recently, lecturers were told that there was no money for mandatory raises, the State Board of Regents announced its intention to eliminate multiple-year contracts, and department needs dictate that they teach only literature courses. Situations such as that at UNR should not be accepted as alternative models but as temporary, transitional arrangements. The solution lies in replacing the single model of the research professor with various models based on the needs of the university in the 1990s. (RS)

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The Reno Lectureships and the CCCC Statement: Are They Wearing White Hats in Nevada?

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We lecturers at the University of Nevada, Reno, feel our situation is particularly relevant to current discussions of the CCCC Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing. As you probably know, the Statement, CCCC's response to the famous Wyoming Resolution, stresses the poor working conditions of non-tenurable teachers of writing and calls for such instructors, except in a few exceptional cases, to be either probationary for tenure or tenured. And this year, the AAUP's Committee G, charged with investigating the state of non-tenure-track faculty in all disciplines, reached the same conclusion, recommending the conversion of such faculty to the tenure line. However, shrinking budgets and the perception that the Statement's goal of equality is unattainable have led a growing number of English faculty to support the creation of a full-time, second tier of faculty, who would be responsible for most of a department's teaching. Even the CCCC Committee on Professional Standards appears to have reached the point of considering the second-tier alternative: their 1991 Progress Report states that "While the language of the document emphasizes tenure, we strongly support, as moves toward equality, alternative models of employment and faculty governance that, in different ways, serve the same ends--that grant writing teachers the rights, privileges, and protections traditionally enjoyed by tenure-line faculty."

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Nevada lecturers are in an excellent position to comment on the second-tier solution as our department implemented it in 1981, when most English departments were still staffing their composition programs entirely with graduate students and part-time instructors. Today, the UNR English Department consists of twenty tenure-track faculty and a second tier of nine lecturers. We also have a fairly stable group of part-time instructors, hired on a semester basis. Nevada's lecturer positions have been cited as one of the strongest of the "alternative models" to the exclusive use of tenure lines: since 1981 we have had three-year, "wrap-around" contracts, we have our own offices and a secretary, salaries range from the high twenties to the low forties, our workload is three courses per semester plus a service assignment, we can be promoted, we have medical and retirement plans, we vote at both the department and university levels as regular faculty members except in matters relating to tenure, we may serve on all faculty and university committees, we are given travel support and are eligible for professional-development leaves and sabbaticals. The University Code states that we shall have academic freedom.

Our chair, Bob Merrill, believes the system works extremely well. While he acknowledges that "my lecturers are much more capable in the teaching of composition than tenure-track faculty" he also feels we must teach more than tenure-line faculty if the research mission of our department is to be preserved. It is essential that we occupy a separate, lower tier,

for our function of "addressing staffing problems within the department" is incompatible with the definition of a tenure-line professor. Bob is genuinely committed to achieving good working conditions for lecturers and to "making the two tiers work well together." He has been instrumental in reducing our teaching load, which has enabled us to do some writing and publishing, which we've discovered enhances our teaching. He has said he is not opposed to tenuring us, provided this does not alter the two-tier structure. But as much as we like Bob, we have to disagree with him.

An underlying assumption of several recent articles arguing for the second tier is that untenurable faculty are chiefly concerned with working conditions and are not (or anyway shouldn't be) concerned with issues of status and power. Thomas Farrell, for example, in an article in Academe, urges policymakers to ignore the problem of status: "Our institutions of higher education already have gradations in faculty appointments--assistant, associate and full professor. We can apparently accept all these gradations and distinctions in status without feeling that we have institutionalized a second, third and fourth class of citizens."

But our experience of the past eight to twelve years has shown us that status is a subject we cannot ignore, much as we might like to. Yes, when we hear the horror stories of the treatment of part-time faculty and lecturers, we do thank God we've ended up in the World's Biggest Little City. But true to

our Western heritage, we're also uppity enough to consider ourselves professionals, and as such we know that being a member of a second tier is fraught with problems. No, being a lecturer to whom the tenure track is closed is most definitely not the same as being an assistant professor, to whom it is open. As we participate in department and university governance, we find ourselves frustratingly both inside and outside the system: we're told that we have all the rights of faculty members, yet everyone knows we belong to a group which is at a distinct disadvantage. The result is that we "masquerade" as full faculty members, pretending to be equals when it is clear to all we are not.

If lecturers are masquerading, those in power often are also: we have discovered that the mask of equality may be abruptly dropped. For example, when one of our professors was unhappy with lecturer politics, our voting rights were submitted to yet another Department vote. Recently, lecturers who were promoted were told there was no money for our mandatory raises (all tenure-track faculty received theirs). And when the State Board of Regents suddenly announced its intention to eliminate multiple-year contracts, we realized we were in danger of returning to our extremely vulnerable, pre-1981 position. This past semester, we were suddenly informed that Department needs now dictate we teach only literature courses, regardless of our preferences. What we've learned from these and similar

experiences is that it is impossible for a group perceived as virtually powerless to function as professionals.

Would tenure make a difference? Yes, because then we would be less dependent on the good will of those in power, which would mean that for the first time we would have academic freedom. (It will not surprise you to learn we have little confidence in the protection provided by the University Code.) And as tenure is now the most common way of distinguishing the tiers, it should decrease the distance between them. The best outcome, of course, would be that called for by the CCCC Statement: our positions would be equal to those of our tenure-track colleagues. If we do get tenure, though, it is far more likely that in the beginning it will not noticeably affect our rank or salaries. But the security provided by even such a second-tier tenure would enable us to work more effectively for change.

So, my message to you from Reno is that "in the fold but off the track" (to use the title of a recent article describing New Mexico's two-tier system) is simply not good enough. CCCC was right in calling for equality for instructors of composition and should not retreat from its original position. Situations such as ours, when they appear, should be accepted not as "alternative models," but as temporary, transitional arrangements. The solution, I'm convinced, lies in replacing the single model of the research professor, which has had such disastrous effects on undergraduate teaching, with various models based on the needs of the university in the nineties. When we accept that we belong to

"this profession which is not one," tiers will be unnecessary because it will be possible to value equally different kinds of contributions.